WINTER 2020 : VOLUME 1 : ISSUE 4

Ṣirāṭ Link

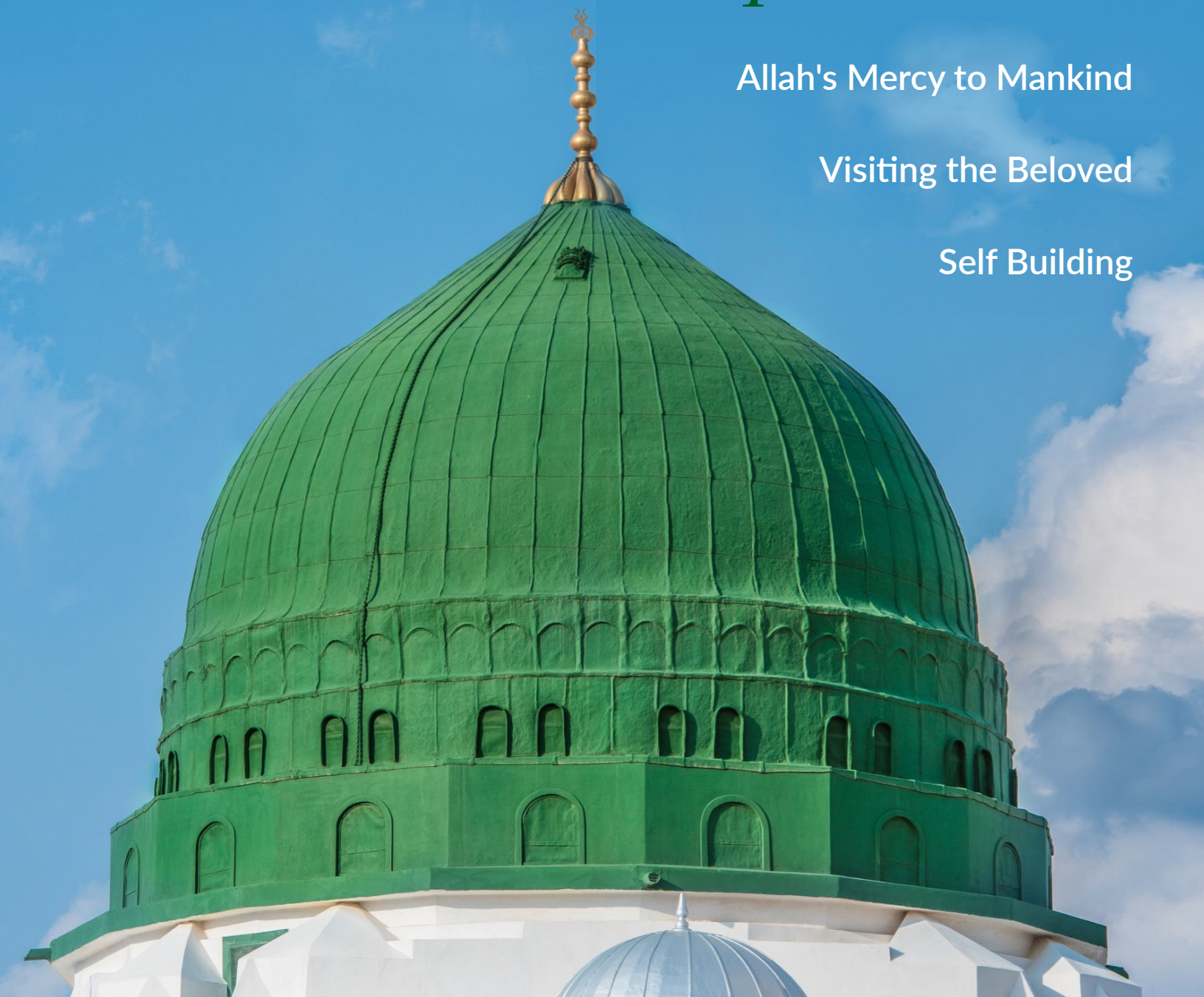
A path for connecting with Allah, others, and one's self

Hope in Allah

Allah's Mercy to Mankind

Visiting the Beloved

Self Building



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Letter from

Salāmun ʿAlaykum,

My best wishes and congratulations to the Imām of our time, Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj), to our great scholars, and to the Muslim ummah on the birth of the best human being created on Earth, the hope and mercy of the worlds, the perfect example and role model for mankind, our Noble Prophet of Islam, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), and on the wilādah (birth anniversary) of our sixth Imām, Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa).

People once came to a prominent scholar and asked him about the two narrations regarding the Prophet's (ṣ) birthday. Should they celebrate on the 12th or 17th of Rabīʿ ul-Awwal? The scholar looked puzzled. He answered, "Should we celebrate just one day for this great man? We are celebrating the birth of the best creation of Allah! We should have a whole week of celebrations!" That week has become one of unity and is celebrated as such all around the world.

However, there is a key point regarding our unity. Our unity cannot be a naive type of unity — it cannot just be a slogan for us to chant a couple of times a year. We need to be smart and even calculating in our unity. We need to be strategic.

Ṣirāṭ Link
A 2nd Chance Books Publication

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

For the love of Him, they feed the needy, the orphan, and the prisoner.

(Noble Qurʾān 76:8)

2nd Chance Books is a non-profit organization that was founded in order to assist incarcerated Muslims by providing them with educational materials, tools for rehabilitation, and a support system. By responding to their numerous questions about Islam, they gain a more thorough understanding of the religion. So far, 2nd Chance has distributed over 13,000 books to inmates across the country.

Among 2nd Chance's most recent initiatives is Ṣirāṭ Link, a quarterly magazine. The title Ṣirāṭ Link, inspired by the Arabic term Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm which means the right path, presents this magazine as a means of guidance to a greater connection to Allah, as well as offering the opportunity for connections with the broader community, and the improvement of one's self. Inshāʾ Allāh it can serve as an opportunity for growing one's faith through education.

This magazine will be under the guidance and oversight of Moulana Nabi Raza Mir Abidi, Resident ʿĀlim of SABA Center, and several other scholars and experts.

MOULANA ABIDI

Photos are of Emad Alhusayni Photography

We cannot hold the banner of unity and ignore our differences. We cannot pretend we are the same when we are not. But we need to be accommodating when it comes to these realities. In accommodation, everyone still stands strong with their beliefs and principles. Accommodation is not conversion. Unity here is empathy, understanding one another, respecting each other's differences, agreeing to disagree in a respectful manner for everyone to see, to understand, and to appreciate. Even in history, we see accommodation: Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) used to answer the questions of people of other faiths, such as Christians and Jews, with their own books!

Indeed, the root cause to all of the disasters in the Muslim ummah is that we have moved away from the ethic that is rooted in Lā ilāha illallāh (the oneness of Allah) and the fruits of this ethical behavior that bring freedom, human rights, equality, and unity. Today, we are split by color, culture, race, language, sects, and are fighting regarding things that go against the Prophet's (ṣ) great moral and ethical values He taught us that in Islam, there is no Black and White, there is no male and female, there are no tribes; there is only taqwā (God-consciousness), and taqwā is not something we judge or measure — only Allah can.

So, what can we do today? If we engage in good dialogue amongst ourselves to have a united front in our common ground, and not highlight our differences, we can be successful. Indeed, we all agree that there are differences and this is a part of history we have to acknowledge. We should not expect others to pray like we do and they should not expect us to pray like they do. But prayer is a common ground! We must stand together and work together to show the truth.

We pray that Allah gives us the courage and strength to actualize our duties and responsibilities and bless us with the status of being the ambassadors of Islam.

Jazākallāh Khayr and best wishes,

Sayyid Nabi R. Mir (Abidi)

SIGNIFICANT DAYS OF SHAHR RABĪʿ UL-AWWAL

8th Death Anniversary of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (ʿa) *October 25th, 2020

17th Birth Anniversary of Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) *November 3rd, 2020

SIGNIFICANT DAYS OF SHAHR RABĪʿ ATH-THĀNĪ

10th Birth Anniversary of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī (ʿa) *November 24th, 2020

SIGNIFICANT DAYS OF SHAHR JAMĀDĪ AL-ŪLĀ

5th Birth Anniversary of Sayyidah Zaynab *December 20th, 2020

13th Death Anniversary of Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) *December 28th, 2020 *This is one narration of two.

*Please note the above Gregorian dates are only estimates. The dates are subject to change based on moon sighting, upon which the Islamic calendar is based.

By Taymaz Tabrizi

The Battles of

In the year 622 A.D., the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) fled to the northern city of Medina because of the Quraysh's assassination attempts on his life. The leaders of Medina had heard about the Prophet's (ṣ) justice and had invited him to the city to help resolve their disputes. In turn, the city became a safe haven for the Prophet (ṣ) where he could spread Allah's message freely and bring peace and blessings to a city that was rife with tribal tension.

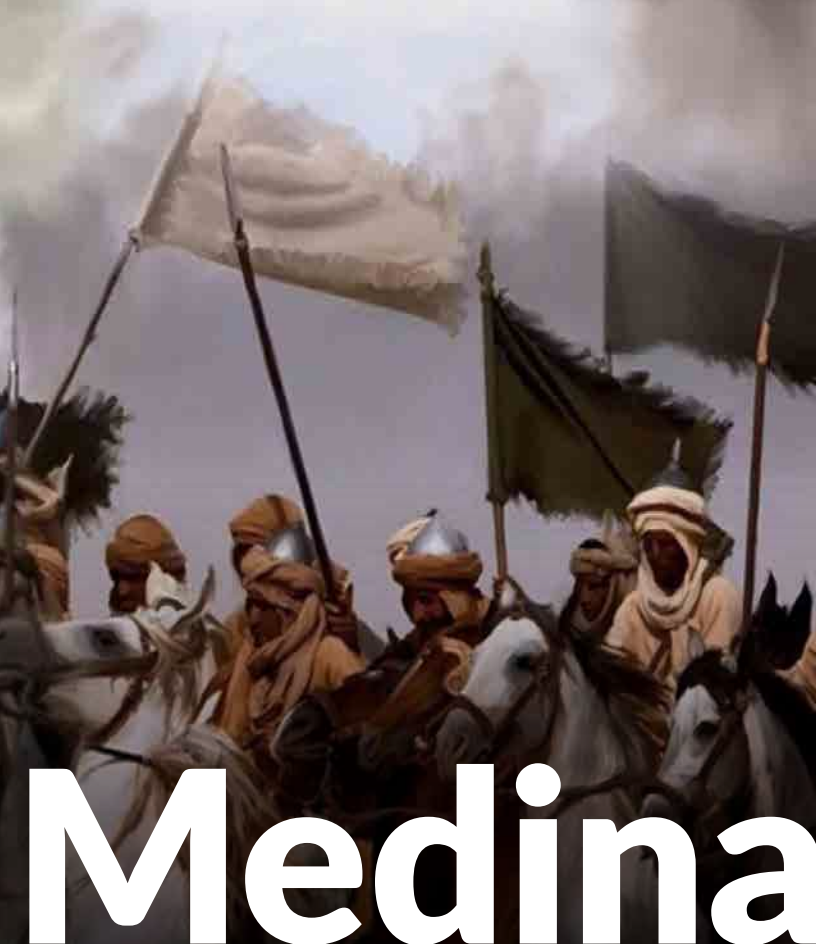
The Prophet's (ṣ) peace in Medina did not last very long. Two years after his arrival at Medina, the leaders of Mecca gathered an army with the intention to ransack Medina and kill the Prophet (ṣ). Although the Prophet (ṣ) was no longer physically in Mecca, the message of Allah was spreading throughout the city and they wanted to put an end to his message as quickly as possible.

A fully equipped army of around 1300 soldiers approached Medina led by one of the leaders of the Quraysh, Abū Jahl, who was Prophet Muḥammad's (ṣ) uncle and a sworn enemy of Islam. The Prophet (ṣ) met the Meccan army at Badr (just south of Medina) with his own army of poorly equipped soldiers numbering around 313 men. Yet with the grace of Allah and the direct help of His angels, they were able to defeat the Meccans in their first war. Abū Jahl died as a result of that battle. Even when all the odds are stacked against us, if we show true piety, character and obedience to God, the forces of good will always be victorious.

The Meccans did not give up, but as long as Muslims listened to the Prophet (ṣ), they were always victorious against the Meccans. The only exception was the Battle of Uḥud.

Almost a year after the battle of Badr, the Meccans, under their new leader Abū Sufyān, renewed their attack on Medina. The Prophet (ṣ) had strategized a way to defeat the Meccans as in previous wars, but this time a number of Muslims did not listen to the Prophet's (ṣ) battle plans. This led to a series of critical mistakes that brought about a stalemate. As a result, many Muslims died and the Prophet (ṣ) himself was injured. The stalemate is symbolic of how Muslims often face disappointments in life. As long as they follow the guidance of the Prophet (ṣ), they will find success. If not, it will only lead to disappointment.

In 627 A.D., the Meccans tried again to attack Medina, this time with an army of ten thousand men in what became known as the Battle of Khandaq. The Prophet (ṣ), with the



Medina

help of his companion Salmān al-Farsī (the Persian), dug trenches around Medina to prevent the Meccans from entering the city. As the Meccans laid siege on the city, they attempted to build a confederacy of allies within Medina and have them attack Muslims from within the city. The Prophet (ṣ) uncovered the plot and managed to disband the conspiracy through diplomacy.

The dismantling of the conspiracy against the Prophet (ṣ), along with bad weather, put enormous pressure on the Meccan army during the siege, shattering the Meccans' morale, and as a result forcing them to retreat in embarrassment.

God gave the Prophet (ṣ) victory during the siege. But the story taught us that God helps us through multiple ways even in times when we think all is lost. Just as God made the forces of nature to prevent his assassination and locate the place of his new Mosque, He also helped the Prophet (ṣ) through the assistance of good company and friends with helpful strategies.

Trust in God, look forward to His guidance through coincidences, and listen to the good and pious friends He gives you.

Qurʿān Corner

رَبِّ ٱجْعَلْنِى مُقِيمَ لصَّلَوٰةِ وَمِن

ذُرِّيَّتِى رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ دُعَآءِ

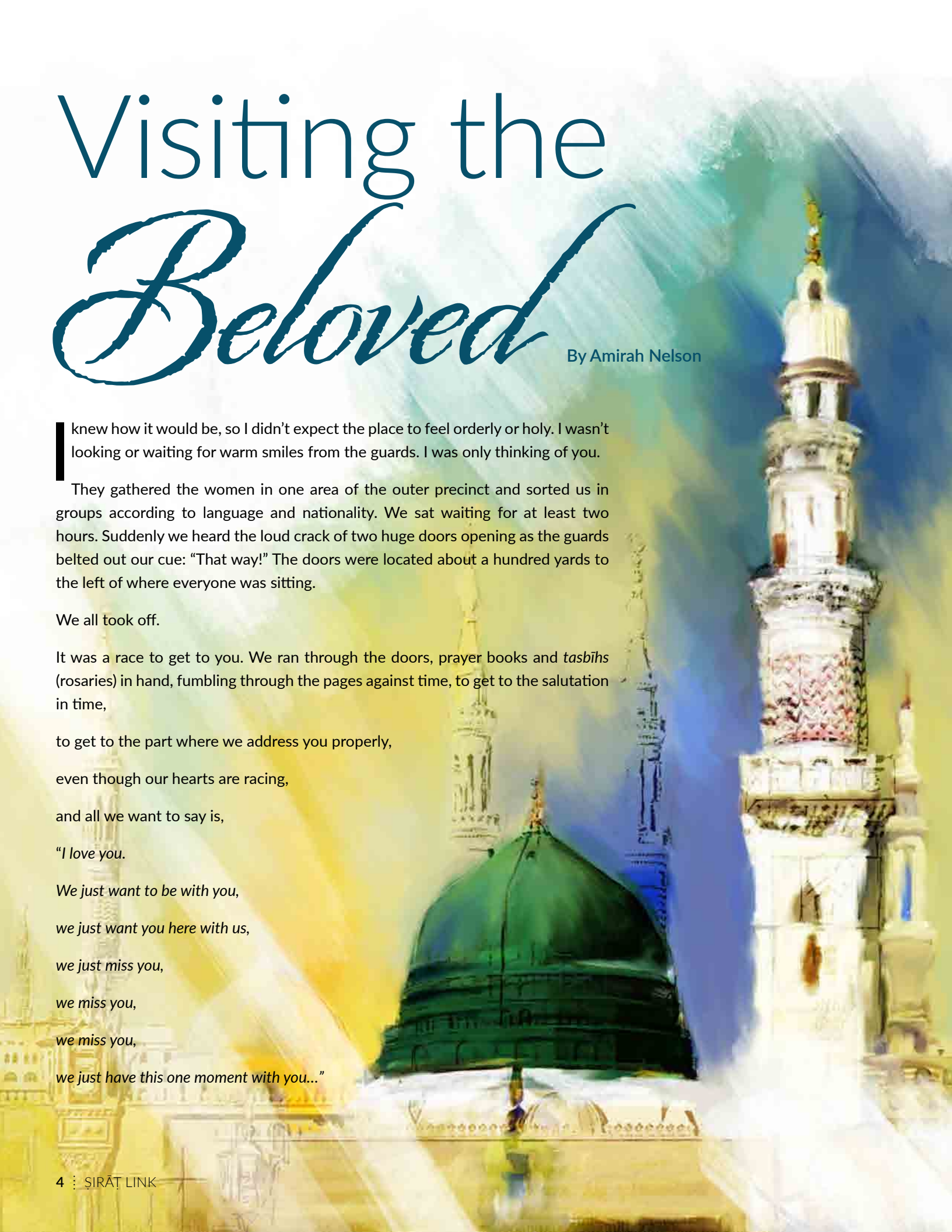
14:40

Rabbij-ʿalnī muqīmaṣ-ṣalāti wa min dhurrīyatī; Rabbanā wa taqabbal duʿā

O my Lord, make me and my offspring steadfast in prayer. Our Lord, accept our supplication!

Visiting the Beloved

By Amirah Nelson



I knew how it would be, so I didn't expect the place to feel orderly or holy. I wasn't looking or waiting for warm smiles from the guards. I was only thinking of you.

They gathered the women in one area of the outer precinct and sorted us in groups according to language and nationality. We sat waiting for at least two hours. Suddenly we heard the loud crack of two huge doors opening as the guards belted out our cue: "That way!" The doors were located about a hundred yards to the left of where everyone was sitting.

We all took off.

It was a race to get to you. We ran through the doors, prayer books and *tasbīhs* (rosaries) in hand, fumbling through the pages against time, to get to the salutation in time,

to get to the part where we address you properly,

even though our hearts are racing,

and all we want to say is,

"*I love you.*

We just want to be with you,

we just want you here with us,

we just miss you,

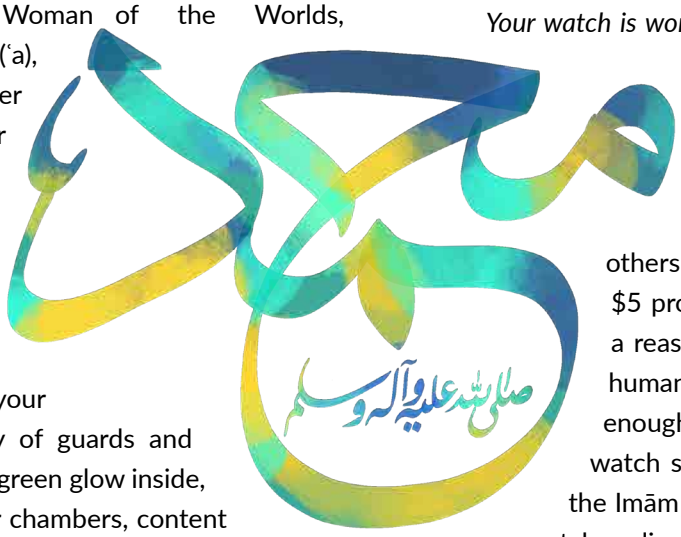
we miss you,

we miss you,

we just have this one moment with you…"

I can remember the stillness. At the end of the maze we came to a wall. Someone said your ḍarīh (a tomb or grave, often surrounded by a steel grate) was on the other side. After I prayed my rakaʿāt (units of prayer), sound dropped away and through the corner of my eyes the flowing fabric swirled together like one big marble painting. Time and space ceased to exist. The only thing speaking was my heart, and I knew that you were listening. As I whispered greetings to you, I now sensed Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) standing next to you. It could have been five minutes or it could have been five days.

At some point, time snapped back and I was once again in the crowd and commotion, gathering up my belongings, making space for the next group of supplicants. We left the masjid, and though I was sure that I had been standing in the presence of you (ṣ) and the Woman of the Worlds, Sayyidah Fāṭimah az-Zahrāʾ (ʿa), my roommates told me that her burial site is unknown. Later that night, I nestled into the comfort of that moment in your presence as I drifted off to sleep.



I dreamt that we were dressed in white walking through your masjid. This time, the energy of guards and visitors was calm. There was a green glow inside, and lush plants filled the inner chambers, content and vibrant under a gentle rainfall.

Since then, I have visited the resting places of many of your children: Imām ʿAlī (ʿa), Imām Ḥusayn (ʿa), Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim (ʿa), Imām ʿAlī al-Hādī (ʿa), Imām ʿAlī ar-Riḍā (ʿa). Each place emotes a different feeling and recalls different moments and memories. The relationships are all unique, and each personality distinct. But the thread of your nūr (light) is woven through all of them and the light of guidance that we seek from each of them - though different by the circumstances of their lives - is the same; while the Imāms are different, they are one. Your message is one.

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "I wish I could meet my brothers." The Prophet's (ṣ) companions said, "Are we not your brothers?" The Prophet (ṣ) said, "You are my companions, but my brothers are those who have faith in me although they never saw me."

Someone once told me that the urge to visit one of the holy personalities does not originate in the visitor, but in the visitee; that we are invited, and our desire to visit is due to that invitation.

Last year, on the birthday of Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj), I attended a program at a masjid in Dallas.

The shaykh shared a story:

There was a man who wanted to see Imām al-Mahdī (ʿaj) and was always trying to figure out where he was. Someone informed him that he should go and sit with this particular watch seller in town to see what goes on in his shop. When the man arrived, an old lady in need of cash came in with a watch to sell. She'd gone to different places trying to get $8 for her watch, but others would only offer $5. After walking into this particular watch seller's shop, the merchant said, *"Listen. Your watch is worth $7. I'm going to buy it for $7 so that you get your watch's worth and at the same time I have to make a halal profit as well. If I buy it from you for $7, I can sell it for $10."* So he went for the $3 profit while others were trying to maximize with a $5 profit. He kept it in the middle, with a reasonable profit. Just being a normal human being with good ethics was enough for the Imām (ʿaj) to look at the watch seller in a specific, special way. So the Imām tells this guy who's been trying to catch a glimpse of him, *"Look you don't have to run after us, we'll come to you if you behave with justice and the true moral and ethical traits of a human being like this person."*

Two Ramaḍāns ago I was walking up a hill in my neighborhood, reflecting on personal trials and the state of the world and feeling weak and overwhelmed. So many years of striving and failing, feeling like my life was just a series of taking one step forward and two steps back. A vision of Medina and the coolness of your masjid at sunset suddenly entered my mind, bringing me back to that last visitation. Tears filled my eyes as I continued uphill. Suddenly, it felt as if you were walking beside me. Maybe it was my imagination. But suddenly I was at ease.

This past year I have been filled with the urge to visit you again. I don't know when that will be, but I take heart in the possibility that you want to see me just as much as I want to see you. I want to do my part to keep that invitation alive.

Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan (8th century, Khorosan) is one of the most prominent Muslim scientists of the early Islamic period. His name has been for many centuries synonymous with utmost authority in alchemy/chemistry. Jabir was a Shīʿah Muslim and he was a disciple of the sixth Shīʿah Imām, Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa). He is responsible for a number of remarkable treatises in diverse scientific subjects.

Islam's

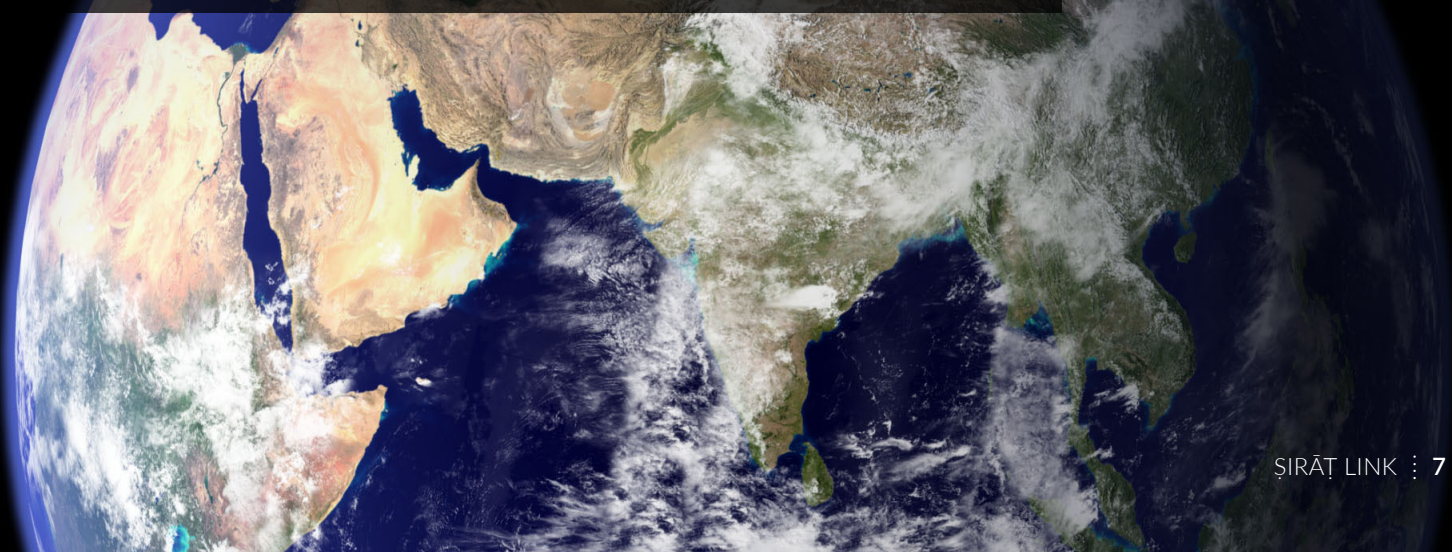
Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham (10th century, Iraq), known as Alhazen in Latin, is among the greatest scientists of physics, mathematics, and astronomy in the Medieval period. He is credited with significant contributions to the study of motion particularly the discovery of the principle of inertia. He made contributions in celestial physics and the science of statics, but he performed pioneering research in optics and made it into a new science and laid the foundations for the future development of the subject.

Golden Age

Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khawarazmi (8th century, Uzbekistan), justly regarded as "the father of algebra," was a great Muslim mathematician who left a tremendous affect on the science of algebra. His works comprise the development of algebra, geometric solutions, degree measurements, and trigonometric tables.

Abu Rayhan Al-Biruni (11th century, Uzbekistan) made detailed studies on the measurements of the surface of Earth, and for this contribution he is regarded as the "father of geodesy." Al-Biruni, in his book entitled *The Book of the Demarcation of the Limits of Areas*, made observations about studying geography and exploring knowledge related to the earth, its climate, its different regions, and people.

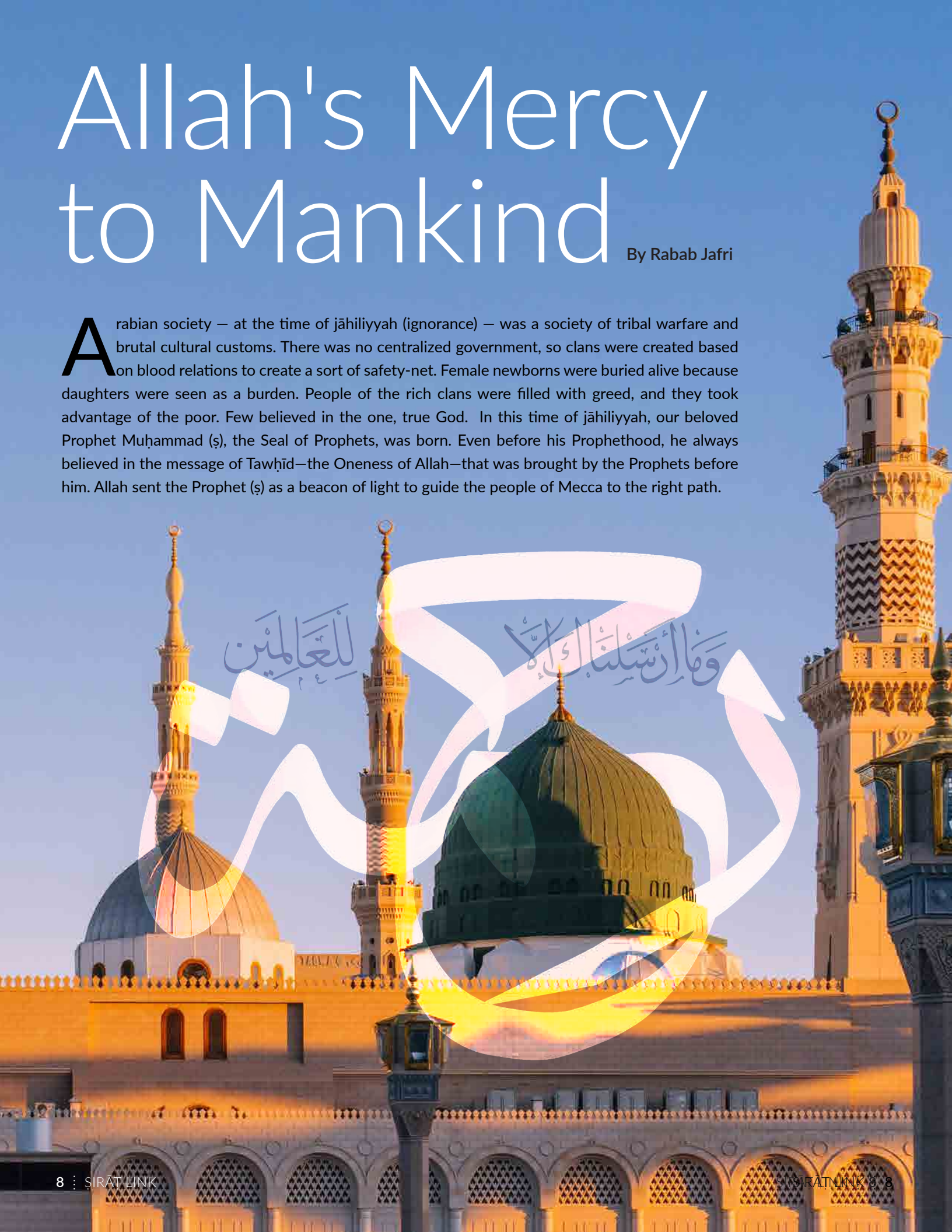
The information provided on this page has been originally compiled by Asad Raza for Islamicinsights.com and has been reproduced here with minor edits.



Allah's Mercy to Mankind

By Rabab Jafri

Arabian society — at the time of jāhiliyyah (ignorance) — was a society of tribal warfare and brutal cultural customs. There was no centralized government, so clans were created based on blood relations to create a sort of safety-net. Female newborns were buried alive because daughters were seen as a burden. People of the rich clans were filled with greed, and they took advantage of the poor. Few believed in the one, true God. In this time of jāhiliyyah, our beloved Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), the Seal of Prophets, was born. Even before his Prophethood, he always believed in the message of Tawḥīd—the Oneness of Allah—that was brought by the Prophets before him. Allah sent the Prophet (ṣ) as a beacon of light to guide the people of Mecca to the right path.



The Noble Prophet (ṣ) was sent as a guide for us, as he has said, *"I was sent to perfect akhlāq (moral character)." Allah says in the Noble Qurʾān, "We have not sent you [Muḥammad] but as a mercy to all the nations" (21:107).* This āyah refers to the way that Allah sent the Noble Prophet (ṣ) to give and spread mercy to not just the people of Arabia but mankind as a whole. The Prophet (ṣ) was mercy, not just one who has mercy—there is a difference between the two. He embodied the perfect trait in the best way, in the way that Allah loves. Furthermore, the Noble Qurʾān makes it clear that all of mankind will benefit from his mercy. It did not extend only to believers but he also extended his kindness to his enemies. It is narrated that after the battle of Uḥud, the Prophet (ṣ) prayed to Allah to overlook the actions of his enemies since they were in a state of ignorance.

Even before his appointment to Prophethood, as a youth in Mecca, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) cared for people who had no one else. While in his youth, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ), along with other youths of Mecca, created a treaty called Ḥilf al-Fuḍūl (the Covenant of High Morals). These young and noble men made a pact and promised to help any stranger who entered Mecca with no tribal or family support. During that time in history outsiders or foreigners were at risk of being treated cruelly by the Quraysh due to a lack of tribal or family support. The treaty remained for several decades and even after his appointment to Prophethood, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) vowed to uphold that promise and help those in need whenever he was called to do so.

Although the arrogant tribal mentality in Mecca was strong, the Noble Prophet (ṣ) remained firm in his message of humility. Abū Sufyān and some of the other strong tribal leaders came to Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and said that they would be willing to accept Islam, on the condition that they would not have to be associated with the poor, slaves, or other races. There was a companion who urged the Prophet (ṣ) to accept this, as he thought it would give the Muslims strength and wealth. Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) refused, demonstrating the importance of destroying this arrogance.

This, and the spread of Islam, angered the wealthy tribe leaders in Mecca, and they began a boycott of the Muslims that lasted three years. During this time, the Prophet's (ṣ) uncle, Abū Ṭālib, his wife, Lady Khadījah, and the Prophet (ṣ) used all of their wealth in the way of Allah to provide for the Muslims. Soon after, both Lady Khadījah and Abū Ṭālib passed away. This year became known as "The Year of Sorrow", because of the pain it left in the heart of our Prophet (ṣ). Thereafter, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) took his people to Medina, in the Ḥijrah (migration) because many of the people in that city had accepted Islam.

When Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) arrived in Medina, people climbed palm trees and sang hymns to welcome him and the Muslims. Every wealthy family wanted the Noble Prophet (ṣ) to be a guest in their home, including his mother's relatives. As a sign for the people, Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) allowed his camel to roam the city and find a place for him to stay. The camel stopped before the house of Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣari, a God-fearing man who was the poorest man in Medina. Abū Ayyūb and his family took Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) as his guest, and from then, it was clear to the people that the Noble Prophet (ṣ) would not give preferential treatment to the wealthy, blood relatives, or influential tribes.

Through Prophet Muḥammad's (ṣ) mercy, we find hope in a better path with the true Islam he brought. It was through his perfect connection to Allah that Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) was able to change the hearts of the people surrounding him. We can take the lessons from the life of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and strive to practice true Islam. We can start by doing what is wājib (obligatory), staying away from what is ḥarām (forbidden), repenting for our mistakes, and trying to perfect our own moral character. If we use the Noble Prophet's (ṣ) divine light to lead us towards Allah, we can be a light for others in our own surroundings.

Spiritual Building

"Indeed, the noblest of you in Allah's sight is the most righteous of you."

(49:13)

By Sayyid Javad Wahedi

Have you ever wondered what the foremost factor is for success in the hereafter, or even how to begin to attain traits associated with such success? If you have these questions, I salute you because these are the questions of all true believers. The essential element of staying on the right path is to make moral and ethical choices by engaging in rational thought and reason before taking any action. As we try to make wise choices, we need a reminder to hold ourselves on the right path to ensure our success. A combination of intellect, using reasoning and ethics, is a good starting point, but that does not ensure success on its own. Our compass taqwā, or God-consciousness, or piety, is the reminder that can help guide our path to Allah.

On Taqwā

Taqwā (God-consciousness) and its derivatives appear more than 250 times in the Qur'ān and it is the Islamic concept of self-restraint. The more good deeds one does and the more one refrains from the impermissible, the stronger one's taqwā becomes. The term taqwā comes from the Arabic root "wa-qa-ya" which means "protection" or "support." Unfortunately, many translate it as fear, but this is incorrect. However, because having fear is a prerequisite to protecting oneself from something harmful, people may sometimes refer to taqwā as having fear of Allah. In other words,

fear is one of the results of taqwā, but not taqwā itself. We fear sin for the distance it may induce between us and Allah, or we fear sin for the consequences it may have. It is worth mentioning that fear without hope toward Allah is not beneficial, but is in fact toxic and dangerous for one's faith. Fear by itself creates hopelessness in the infinite mercy of Allah, which is a serious sin. The Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa) taught us that to seek proximity, one must have two wings: fear and hope. Imām ʿAlī as-Sajjād (ʿa) states in the well-known Duʿā of Abū Ḥamzah Thumālī:

"O, My Lord! When I look at the sins I have committed, I become fearful, and when I look at Your generosity, I harbor hope."

Allah is not meant to be viewed as an abominable or frightening entity–but a just merciful one. In fact, He himself introduces Himself as the All-Kind and All-Merciful. In addition, from this mercy, also stems justice. There is no justice without fairness and in this, Allah is absolute perfection. This notion is overwhelmingly present in the Qurʾān, including in the teachings of our beloved Prophet (ṣ) and his Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). In Duʿā Jawshan al-Kabīr, it is said:

"O Who is not hoped but for His favor, and is not feared but His justice."

Therefore, we fear the result of sins without repentance, leading inevitably to the displeasure of our Lord. But, we also have hope in His mercy, because we trust that He will never do injustice in the slightest to any soul.

Purity and impurity

The Lord, who created everything with His Absolute Might and Wisdom, commands us to avoid impurity and enjoy purity. Imagine that you created a product, is it not true that you as the designer of this product know best in what condition this product can work optimally? This is similar to us. The Creator of you and I has the ultimate wisdom of what actions cause harm to us. Therefore, out of His kindness, He forbids us from committing those actions.

Allah states in the Noble Qurʾān:

"Say, 'My Lord has forbidden immoralities - both open and secret - and sin, and unjustified aggression, and that you associate with Allah anything for which He revealed no sanction, and that you say about Allah what you do not know.'" (7:33)

If we ponder more in-depth into the concepts of permissible and prohibited, we would understand that it is in our best interest to abide by the commands of our Creator. The only way to achieve a peaceful life is to follow the teachings of our Lord, His Messengers, and the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa). In a profound narration, Imām Muḥammad al-Jawād (ʿa) has said: *"Your heart will tell you the truth, put your hand on your heart, because your heart will be at ease with ḥalāl (permissible actions) and will be disturbed with sins. Indeed believers will abandon (even) minor sin out of fear of committing major sin."* We know that sometimes it is small bad deeds that can lead one to greater and much more worrisome bad deeds.

Preconditioning, Watching Over the Soul and Self-Examination

Dear friends, there are three practical tips to practice taqwā:

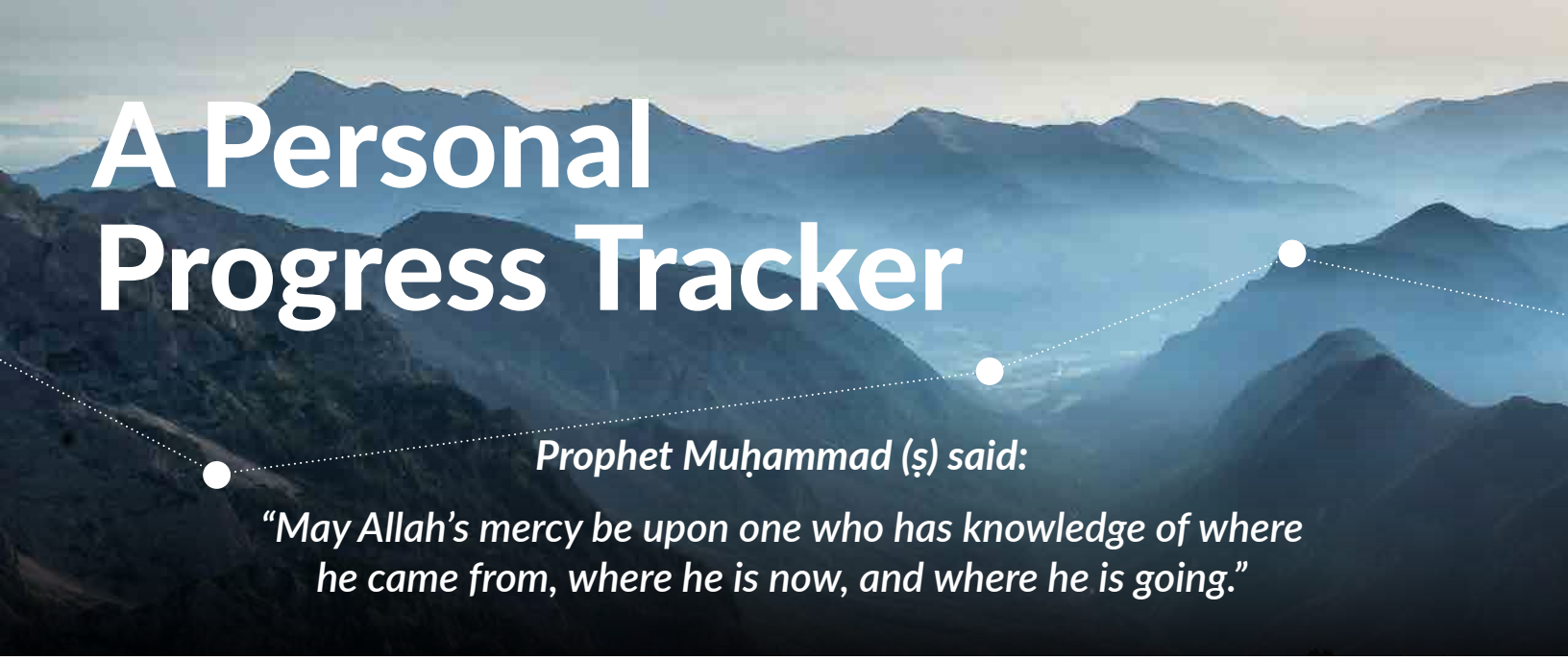
When we start our day, we should renew our intentions for fulfilling our duties and practicing within the lawful bounds of our faith. We have to hold on to the rope of Allah and believe that our beloved Lord is present; in this way, we condition ourselves to avoid sins and fulfill our obligation.

While we promise to be on the right path, we must watch our actions; in a sense, it's a constant self-monitoring and self-awareness. With this practice, we build a spiritual will power which results in nearness to Allah. Seeking help from Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa), as they are the light of guidance, is always beneficial.

Lastly is self-examination. This part is the completion of all other steps. Every night we must spend some time evaluating ourselves. If we committed sins, we should seek forgiveness. If we did good deeds, we should praise Allah and ask Him to increase our opportunities to enhance our righteous deeds. Imām Jaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq (ʿa) narrated that Imām ʿAlī (ʿa) advised one of his devoted companions with the following statement:

"O Abū Dharr! Hold yourself accountable before they hold you accountable, and for your accounting to be easy tomorrow."

The following pages will delve deeper into the above steps for spiritual self building.



A Personal Progress Tracker

Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) said:

"May Allah's mercy be upon one who has knowledge of where he came from, where he is now, and where he is going."

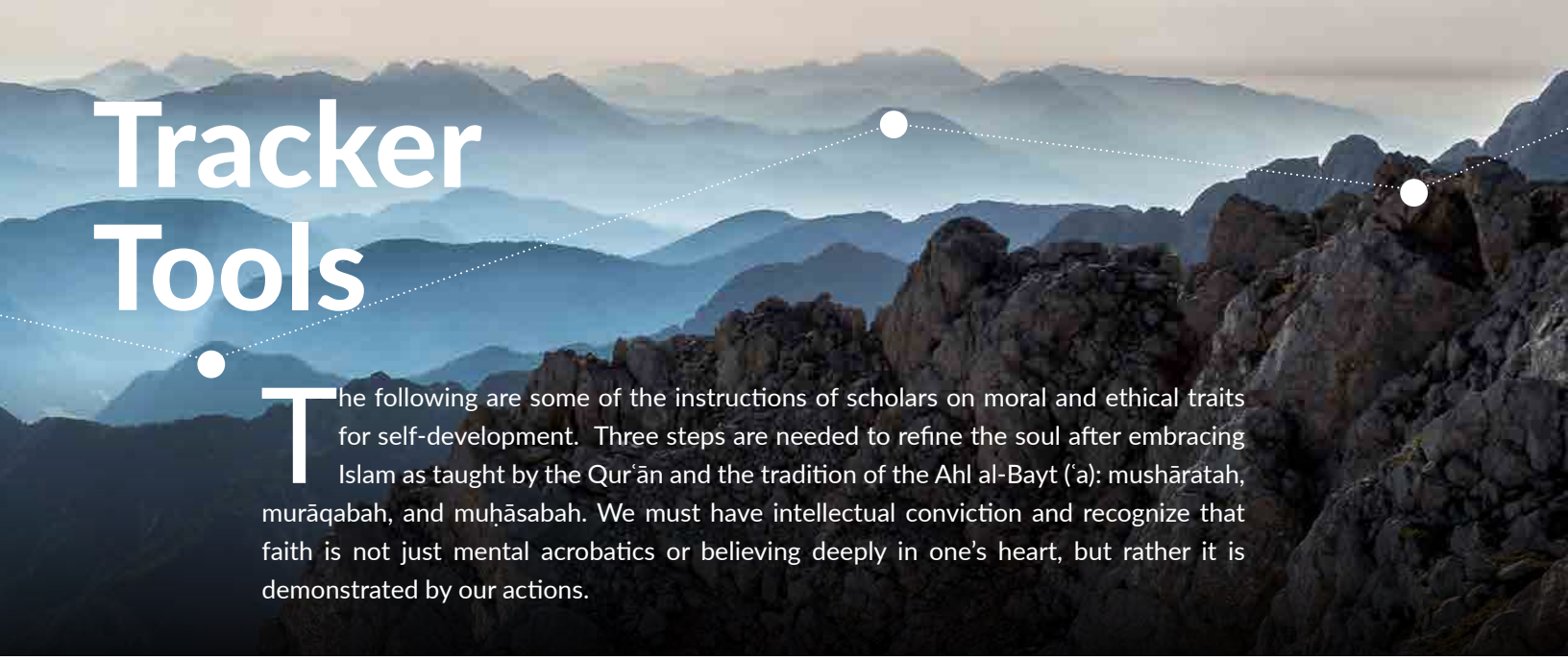
When one wants to grow closer to their Creator, there is a precursor to that closeness. Firstly, one should strive to understand what responsibilities one must accept in relation to their Creator's commandments. Beyond knowledge of those responsibilities is the implementation and perfection of them. To spiritually progress requires identifying what needs improvement in a person's life. Whether it is to consistently complete one's prayers and abide by the lawful and unlawful, for example, this spiritual building is never-ending and is meant to be a constant work in progress for every believer. That should not deter us from seeking growth, instead, it should inspire us to rise to the challenge. That being said, it is helpful to focus on a larger goal and identify a few weaknesses to work on at a time, instead of a large list that may feel overwhelming.

For your own safe keeping, write some personal reflections below based on the following prompts:

Where are you spiritually, today? Think about the actions that bring you closer to Allah and how you feel about those, as well as the negative ones that push you away from Allah.

Where would you like to go spiritually, tomorrow? Are there any practical things you can change right now that would assist you in moving toward that direction? What can you keep doing well?

List some personal goals you'd like to achieve:



Tracker Tools

The following are some of the instructions of scholars on moral and ethical traits for self-development. Three steps are needed to refine the soul after embracing Islam as taught by the Qurʿān and the tradition of the Ahl al-Bayt (ʿa): mushāratah, murāqabah, and muḥāsabah. We must have intellectual conviction and recognize that faith is not just mental acrobatics or believing deeply in one's heart, but rather it is demonstrated by our actions.

Mushāraṭah is to make a firm intention on a daily basis to stay away from all sin and do all our lawful duties. At the beginning of the day, we can address our *nafs* (inner self) directly, advising it to stay on the straight path throughout that day.

Setting a firm intention today for:

Murāqabah is one of the pillars of spiritual development. It is remaining vigilant throughout the day so that we avoid sin and ensure we perform our responsibilities. We see ourselves in the presence of Allah and try not to become heedless of that fact.

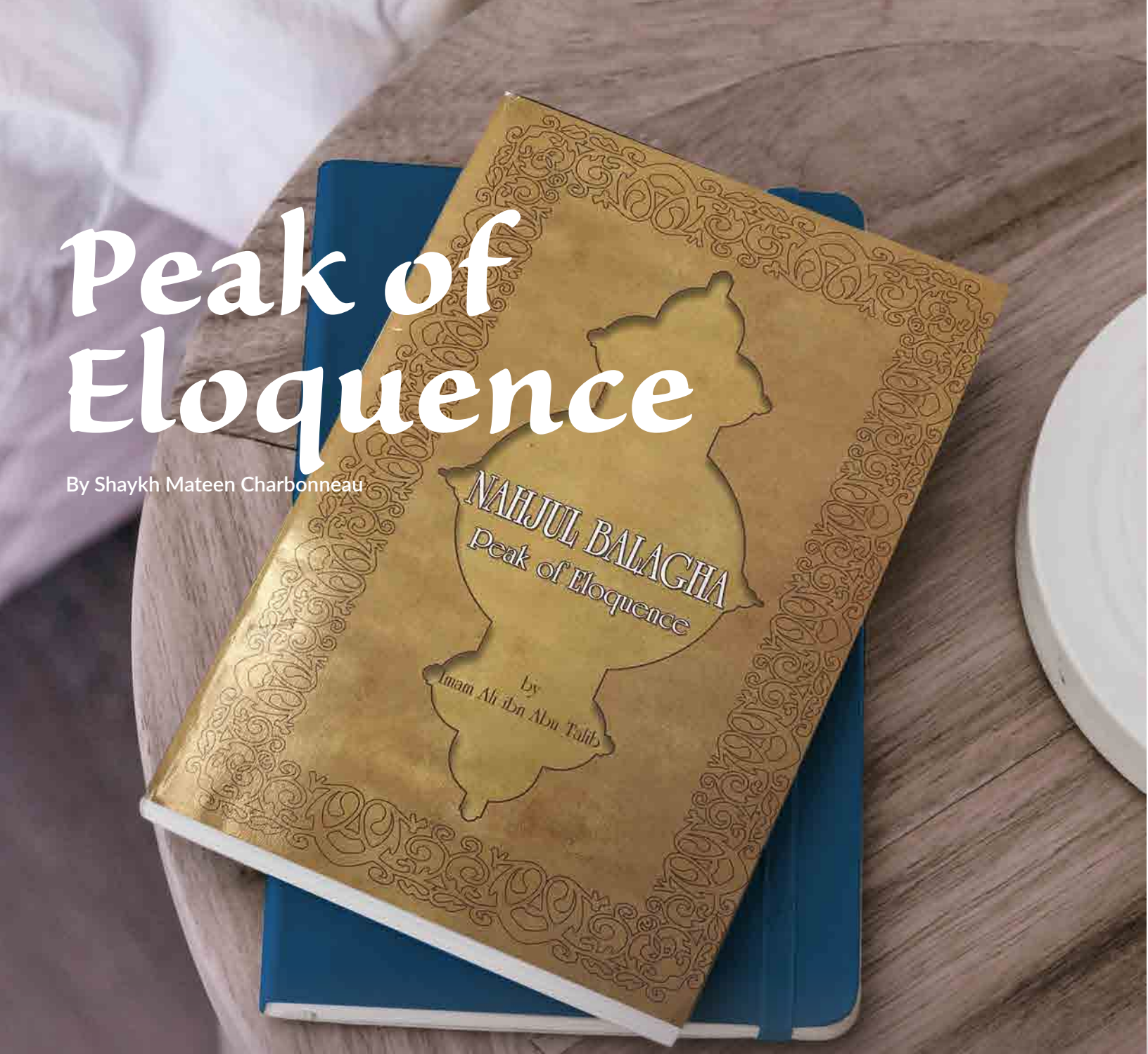
My actions requiring ***murāqabah***:

Muḥāsabah is to take account of oneself. At the end of the day it is important to review one's actions. If, God forbid, we made a mistake, we should ask for forgiveness. We may retrace our steps and try to look a little deeper to see what caused this slip and address that real core issue. If we see success and the favor of Allah in doing our responsibilities, we give credit where credit is due. We thank Allah for the success and praise Him. This helps us develop Islamic self-confidence where we realize Allah can do great things through us and our hands. His Grace is not limited. If we follow His commands, He will take our hands.

My actions that require ***muḥāsabah***:

Peak of Eloquence

By Shaykh Mateen Charbonneau



Many hear of the great text of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿa), Nahj al-Balāghah, or Peak of Eloquence, but do not know much about it or its origins. Let's take a look and see what this great book is all about by reviewing the compilation process of Nahj al-Balāghah, the compiler, and what some famous scholars have said about it.

The compiler of Nahj al-Balāghah, Sayyid Sharif al-Radi, was born in Baghdad in the year 359 A.H. He was trained along with his brother Sayyid Murtada by the great Shīʿah theologian Shaykh al-Mufid. Sayyid al-Radi was a great student and considered to be a prodigy by his teachers. Sayyid al-Radi died between 45 to 47 years of age, but throughout his life, he accomplished many things, such as writing approximately 40 books on various religious sciences.

One of the great works of Sayyid al-Radi is the compilation of the book Nahj al-Balāghah, completed in the year 400 A.H. This book is a compilation of sayings of the first Imām (ʿa), Amīr ul-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿa), comprised of 239 sermons, 79 letters, and 489 sayings of the Imām (ʿa). These do not encompass all of the Imām's sermons, but were the ones that Sayyid al-Radi was able to gather in

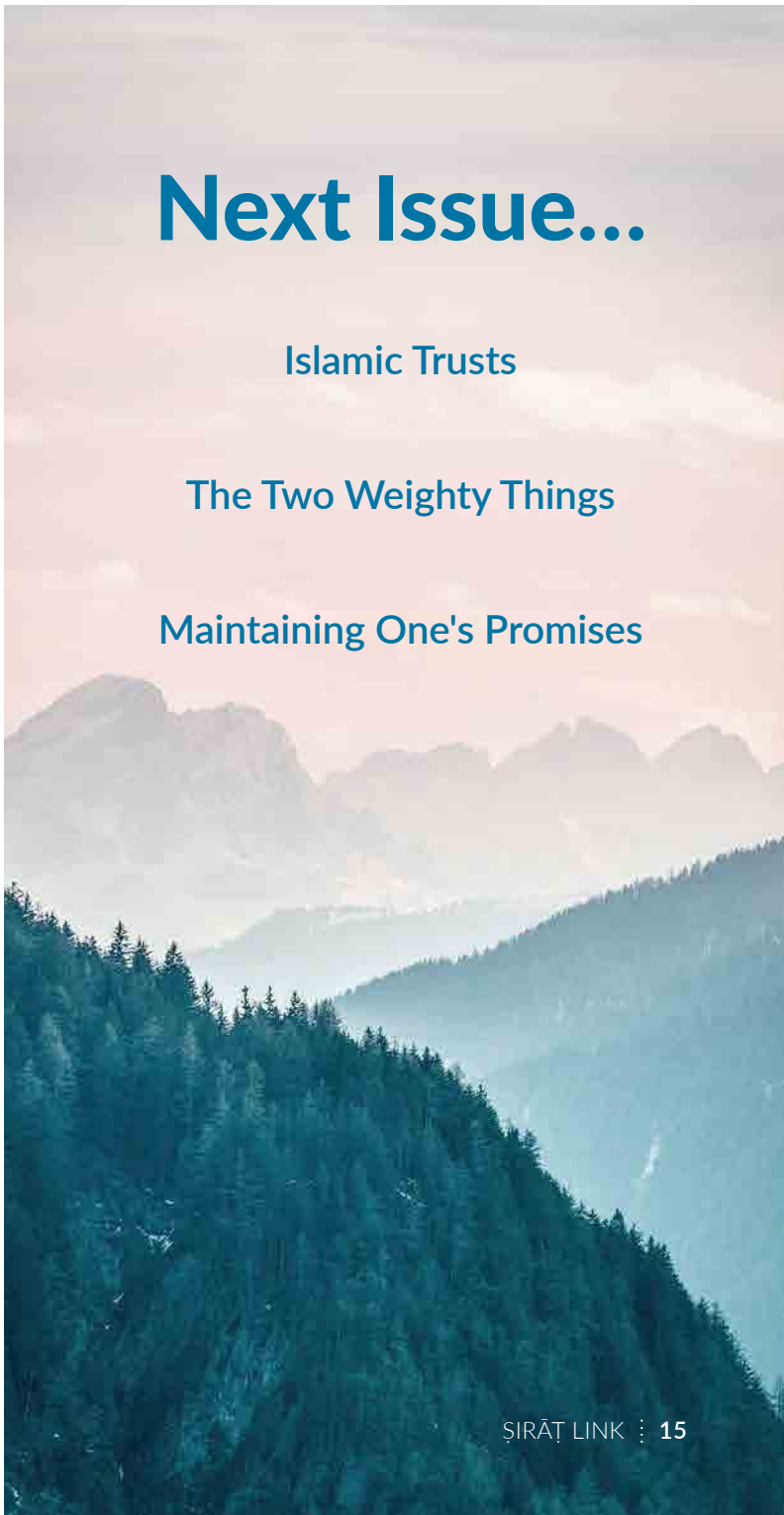
While traveling across the Arabian Peninsula to collect and preserve Imām ʿAlī's (ʿa) sermons, letters, and sayings, Sayyid al-Radi would often spend 18 hours a day working on the compilation.

Nahj al-Balāghah is truly a masterpiece of Arabic literature and rhetoric. Many people, even from other sects of Islam, including eleven famous commentators from the Ahl ul-Sunnah, and some from amongst the Christians, have written about the beauty of this book. The late Mufti of Egypt, Shaykh Muhammed Abduhu (1323 A.H.), a renowned Sunnī scholar, wrote a commentary on Nahj al-Balāghah. He said in his introduction, *"Everyone who fully understands the Arabic language must agree that the sermons and sayings of ʿAlī (ʿa) are next only to the words of God and His Prophet (ṣ). ʿAlī's (ʿa) words are so full of meaning and they convey such great ideas that this book should be carefully studied, referred [to] and quoted by students as well as teachers."*[1] He also persuaded the universities of Cairo and Beirut to include Nahj al-Balāghah in their courses for advanced studies of literature and philosophy. The famous Christian author and poet Polos Salamah, in his book Awallay Mulhamah Arabia, states *"The famous book Nahj al-Balāghah is the work which makes one realize the great mind of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (ʿa). No book can surpass it, but the Qurʾān. In it, you will find pearls of knowledge strung in beautiful chains, flowers of language making one's mind fragrant with the sweet and pleasing smell of heroism and nobility, and streams of chaste language sweeter and cooler than the famous stream of Kawthar flowing constantly and refreshing the minds of the readers."*[2]

The text of Nahj al-Balāghah covers many topics, including the Imām's (ʿa) thoughts on historical events of that time. The reader would benefit greatly from these speeches, particularly those on historical events, but would also need to study and read Islamic history alongside the text to comprehend fully the references being made. Some of the many topics covered in the Imām's (ʿa) sermons, letters, and sayings are the origin of creation, mankind's purpose and accountability, the justice of God, the status of the Noble Prophet (ṣ) and his family (ʿa), theological issues, supplications, the reality of this world, the hereafter, the Noble Qurʾān, morality and ethics, critiques of society, and repentance, to name a few.

One of the beauties of this work is that no matter how much time has elapsed, over 1,000 years, it still remains beneficial to people in this day and age. May God give us the divine privilege to study and benefit from this jewel of Islamic wisdom we have from our master Imām ʿAlī, Amīr ul-Muʾminīn (ʿa).

Would you like a copy of Nahj al-Balāghah? To request a free one, write to the ʿālim (Islamic scholar) on page 16 of this magazine. Do not forget to include your full name, inmate number, and return address on either your letter or the envelope.



1Nahj al-Balāghah translated by Sayed Ali Reza, Introduction, P. 7

2Nahj al-Balāghah translated by Sayed Ali Reza, Introduction, P. 8

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Transliteration Guide

Arabic terms in this booklet have been transliterated according to the following guidelines:

ء	a, i, or u (initial form)
ء	ʾ (medial or final form)
ا	a
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	j
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	ʿ
غ	gh
ف	f
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	h (without iḍāfah)
ة	t (with iḍāfah)
ـَـ	a
ـِـ	i
ـُـ	u

Arabic Glossary

Adhān:
The call to prayer

al-Fātiḥah:
The first sūrah of the Qurʾān

Rakʿah:
One unit of prayer

Fajr:
The obligatory morning prayer

Ẓuhr:
The obligatory noon prayer

ʿAsr:
The obligatory late noon prayer

Maghrib:
The obligatory evening prayer

ʿIshāʾ:
The obligatory night prayer

And your Lord says,

"My mercy encompasses all things"

Noble Qur'ān, 7:156